

Social Questions

BULLETIN

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of the Methodist Federation for Social Service (unofficial), an organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

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UNDERSTANDING THE SOVIET UNION

It is generally agreed among those who want the principles of the Atlantic Charter to be developed concretely, now and in the post-war world, that the possibility of doing this depends upon continued and increasing collaboration between the United States and the Soviet Union, involving, of course, Great Britain and China. This collaboration in turn depends upon increasing understanding of the Soviet Union by the people of the United States.

OUR KIND OF PEOPLE

When Quentin Reynolds, well-known war correspondent, was attached to the United States Supply Mission to the Soviet Union, he spoke over the air from Moscow to the English speaking peoples. In the course of that address he said, "When I go out on the street and talk to the people of the Soviet Union I am impressed with the fact that they are our kind of people." That has been my own experience in two periods of study there.

Soviet people are young people. In '38, 63% were under 29 and 45% under 19. 284 deputies in the Supreme Soviet are under 30. The oldest member of the staff of one of the largest war production plants in the Urals is 35. Most of the generals now leading Soviet armies are between 30 and 40 or just over 40.

More recently Maurice Hindus writes that the most interesting population group is that from 16 to 18 who were born into Soviet life. He describes them as punctual, disciplined, polite, strong for orderliness — personally and socially. He says they are passionately patriotic in the sense of love of the Russian land and people. "For these they will fight for years and years if necessary." In '38, M. J. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain, told the University College of Wales, "Our Soviet youth is pacifist, but not the pacifism of non-resistance to evil. It will defend its fatherland, its future, and the future of its children with a firm hand."

Speaking of the behavior of Soviet youth in the war, Metropolitan Nikolai of Kiev (Greek Orthodox Church) says: "It is only people of high moral and spiritual stamina who are able to forget material blessings, to rise above material wants. Such is our youth,

guided by patriotic duty. . . And we see that the years which have passed since the Revolution have not been lived in vain. Today, 25 years later, we see the face of the generation which has grown up in these years. It is the face of a true human. I repeat the universally known truth of the gospel: . . . neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Last November, the Zurich newspaper published an account of the visit of a Swiss Protestant pastor to a group of Soviet prisoners of war who had escaped from Germany and were interned in Switzerland. He says the majority of those with whom he talked are young people who only recently completed their military training, hence the typical "product of the present Soviet order." He finds that though "they come from different parts of the country, often separated from one another by hundreds and even thousands of miles," their psychology is the same. "A strongly expressed feeling of comradeship helps them better to endure their captivity and make the egoism of the individual impossible. Although they have got to know one another only recently, they share all presents equally. . . . As an individual I find myself very close to them. They are simple, frank and honest people who are not afraid of self-criticism and are remarkable for their social convictions, which have much in common with real Christianity. They are so strongly imbued with their ideas and with a sense of integrity that I must admit I can give them nothing. We can all learn from them."

ARE THEY DEMOCRATIC?

To grant the right of the Soviet people to their own economic and political system does not provide a strong enough base for continuing collaboration in the international development of democratic principles and practice. This can only happen if both of us genuinely desire that development. Only if we agree on the general nature of the goal to be reached can we agree to differ about our respective ways of getting there and still work together internationally.

In 1919 Lenin reported to the First Congress of the Third International concerning the new Soviet State. He contended that it was the only instrument that could lead to the Marxist goal of doing away with the repressive state and attaining "true democracy, that is, freedom and equality." These are the two ideals which were written into all the great historic documents of the Western democracies. Before Lenin, Marx and Engels

had proclaimed that the achievement of classless, communist, society meant the realization of "a really full democracy, a democracy without any exceptions."

Soviet youth are taught to seek this goal. In '31-2 I found the Young Pioneers and new members of the Communist Party being taught that material resources will one day be so abundant and so equally distributed that all will be free to develop their cultural capacities. In Ambassador Maisky's '38 address on Soviet Youth, quoted above, he spoke of the possibilities before the "socialist economy", and concluded: "In the more distant future, when the productive forces are developed to the full, when huge armament expenditures are unnecessary or reduced, we foresee the time when the state will go over to the free distribution of products in accordance with the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." So when you ask the Soviet young people what their country is doing they say, "We are building socialism." "And then?" "Then we will have communism." Ask them what that means, and they reply always in terms of the two basic democratic ideals — more equality and more freedom.

By historic circumstances, as well as on the principle that the essence of freedom lies in equality of opportunity, more equality has come before more freedom in Soviet development. It has been the other way with us. It cannot be disputed that they have made great gains in realizing equality of opportunity for women, for children and youth, and for the 60 national groups that make up the union. The details can be found most easily in the Dean of Canterbury's book, "Soviet Power."

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

The important thing to understand about the development of freedom in the Soviet Union is that first they laid the foundations of an economic democracy, then on this base they proceeded to develop a political democracy, again the opposite course from ours. The development of Soviet economic democracy can be seen in the working out of their five-year social-economic plans. They are now in the third of these. These plans are not put down on the people by bureaucratic decree. The first draft goes down through the whole country for discussion until every worker in every factory or mine, on every farm, railroad or ship has had a chance to express his or her judgement about the particular job for which they are responsible. Most of the time they have increased the quotas the Planning Board thought their machine or job might turn out for the next period. The plan is not complete until all these suggestions have been worked over at planning headquarters. The results are checked at regular intervals by the local workers and necessary revisions made by headquarters. Thus Stalin was correct in reporting to the first International Planning Conference that the Plan in the Soviet Union was not something put on paper by experts, but the life of the people working together.

It is this experience of working together in a creative enterprise which explains Soviet unity and efficiency in running the war. For example, their remarkable record in dismantling factories, transporting them to the inte-

rior, setting them up again and turning out war materials in record time. They are fighting for more than hearth, home and fatherland, they also defend a great national development which they have built together, and the hope of a greater one. The initiative of guerilla warfare and then its coordination in the total strategic plan is the counterpart of the same combination in factories and mines, on farms, railroads and ships. The date can be found in my study of Soviet social incentives "In Place of Profit." In their long retreat there was no blocking of the roads with refugees as there was in Western Europe so that troops and supplies could not move to the front. The evacuation of villages was carried out by the same local people's organizations which had administered the collective farms. And there was complete coordination with the military.

No question of policy in the Soviet Union, from top to bottom, is ever decided by one man, always by a committee. In the beginning they also tried to decide questions of administration in committees. They learned painfully that administration must be left to the executive. But he is under democratic check by the monthly mass meeting, which reviews the record in every institution. Also he can be, and is, as I have witnessed, called to answer before the workers any emergency complaint. Local executives sometimes become dictatorial as they do everywhere, but they do not last long. One important factor is periodical "cleansings" of the Communist Party membership after public hearings.

POLITICAL FREEDOM

As their economic democracy has developed, the people of the Soviet Union have moved toward more political freedom. They started further back in the fight for liberty than where we began over a hundred and fifty years ago. So, to be accurately assessed in relation to future possibilities, the blots on their record must be measured by an earlier historic scale. Their gains are shown by the constitution of '36. Its drafting was put in the hands of a commission of 31 of their ablest historians, political scientists and economists. They were instructed to study all the constitutions they could get hold of, including those of labor unions and voluntary societies. They were told to draw up the most democratic constitution in the world, the one which would most accurately express the will of the people. This draft was sent throughout the country for discussion, as all major questions of internal policy are. 36,500,000 people attended meetings to consider it. 154,000 amendments came back, many of them duplicates. They were all classified and considered. Speaking for the Commission, Stalin presented a dozen to the convention for discussion. Most of these were designed to increase democratic expression and were recommended favorably. Three would have limited democratic development and were reported adversely.

This constitution provides universal suffrage above 18, and the secret ballot. Thus the franchise is restored to priests and religious workers. The political system is completely representative, with direct and easily operated recall. Representation is almost predominantly vocational. Legislators, local and national, are nominated

and elected because of their services to the community in their trade or profession. They represent the people, not a party trying to get or hold office. For example, an internationally known scientist is a member of the Moscow Soviet from an apartment district. For so many nights before it meets he goes the rounds, one apartment house to a night. In each a house meeting has been called. He lays before it the proposed agenda for the Soviet session and calls for expressions of opinion. Then he asks for suggestions concerning additions to the agenda.

The Soviet Union is often spoken of as a totalitarian state. That this is an error should be clear even from this outline sketch of Soviet democracy. A totalitarian state is one which proclaims the state to be the be-all and end-all of human existence. The Soviet view is the opposite. It holds that the state, even the workers' state, is by nature repressive and therefore evil, and expects it to gradually disappear as the people learn to govern themselves. In this situation the fact that there is only one party in the Soviet Union does not make the state totalitarian. The Soviet Communist Party is not a political party in our sense of the word. It is a leadership organization to guide the nation through a crisis, like that which Sun Yat Sen created to give China a period of "tutelage." Like him, Lenin expected the "party" to gradually disappear as the need for it grew less. The possibility of that is not decided by philosophizing about the corrupting nature of power but by watching the facts about the increase of non-party share in Soviet controls since the first five-year plan was started. The party forms to fit a socialist economy have to be worked out by trial and error.

ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGION

The war has carried further the change in attitude between the Soviet government and the churches registered in the constitution of '36. The churches have supported the defense of the fatherland with their prayers and with large contributions for special comforts and equipment for the Red Army. The Holy Russian Orthodox Church, the Christian Church of Old Believers, the Representatives of Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians, all sent Christmas epistles to their members in the occupied regions, exhorting them to utmost resistance against the invaders and the complete destruction of Hitlerism, especially urging them to support and cooperate with the guerillas. Similar expressions were issued by Jewish and Moslem leaders. Metropolitan Nikolai of Kiev is a member of the Extraordinary State Committee investigating the crimes committed by the fascist invaders in Soviet territory. For the government Stalin has expressed appreciation of the war activities of the churches, and last year, with air raids a constant menace and a state of siege existing in the capital and other cities, Easter Eve was exempted from the siege regulations in order that the Orthodox Church might observe its greatest religious holiday.

At the beginning of the war the anti-religious society suspended for the duration because there were more important things to do. It is doubtful if it resumes. The

younger generation is not sufficiently interested. That part of the society's campaign which battled for science against religious obscurantism is won. The interference with services, and the outraging of the feelings of believers by scurrilous demonstrations, which sometimes accompanied its earlier campaigns, have been for some time stopped by law. When the war broke it had become respectable and dull.

Metropolitan Sergei of Moscow and Metropolitan Benjamin of North America have recently given interviews on the state of religion in the Soviet Union. The former says: "I must first of all say that no one in Russia has ever hindered us from serving our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Our church suffers from no insufficiency of material equipment for religious services. The Holy Word resounds freely in our churches. . . . As you can see everything that is written about our being deprived of 'liberty' is nonsense." The latter adds: "New priests are constantly being ordained. Ordination takes place openly without hindrance. . . . Though the number of priests is smaller than before the revolution, the quality is higher. . . ." He hopes that the question of religious education will be solved in the near future.

There remains the position of the Communist Party that religion is socially reactionary and unnecessary. This is a question of historic fact, and the spirit of enquiry concerning the facts is appearing, with no attempt to suppress it. The intellectual climate is completely different from the days when Bukharin was the chief philosophical influence in the party. Recently public statements have been made by members of the Academy of Sciences on the creative and progressive role of early Christianity. The basis on which history will decide between religion and anti-religion is which contributes more to the development of the basic ethical qualities upon which human progress depends. Consequently it is on the strengthening of these qualities in the present crisis and not in argument that our religious forces need to expend their strength.

—HARRY F. WARD.

For Further Reading

- The Soviets, Albert Rhys Williams.
- The Soviet Power, Hewlett Johnson.
Int'l. Pub. (Paper 35c).
- The Soviets Expected It, Anna Louise Strong.
Dial Press, N. Y. (Paper 50c).
- In Place of Profit, Harry F. Ward.
- Russia at War — 50 Questions Answered,
American Russian Institute,
56 W. 45 St., N. Y. 5 cents.
- Soviet Russia Today, Monthly Magazine,
114 E. 42 St., N. Y. 15c.
\$1.50 per year.

Danger Ahead

A heavy propaganda drive is now trying to create distrust of the Soviet Union concerning the Baltic States. Poland, Karelia and Bessarabia come in as similar but differing issues. The Soviet position is that the Baltic states entered the Soviet Union as autonomous republics by democratic choice and it is therefore the obligation of the government to defend the honor and integrity of the Union. Concerning their occupation armies the Soviet claim is that their presence made possible the first free elections for years because the fascist elements which had been in control were afraid to continue their repression. It was popular front governments thus elected which voted for affiliation. The facts can be ascertained. Their interpretation involves a question as to the meaning of democracy which will arise in a number of countries, where United Nations forces are supposed to do what the Soviet government says it did. Is democracy a set of political forms which enable capitalists, landlords and their intellectual dependents to hold the substance of power — as in the poll-tax states; or is it the overwhelming majority of the people — in the European countries in question, peasants and workers — taking democratic power themselves?

Our Evacuees

Federation members who read Mr. Heist's account (Social Questions Bulletin, May, 1942) of the evacuation of 110,000 Japanese-Americans from West Coast Military Areas to inland centers, will be heartened at the news that the Federal Government is endeavoring now to speed the dispersal of these evacuees from the relocation camps.

These Japanese-Americans, who underwent a complete disintegration of their community life, and were forced to live in camps of "mini-

mum standards" in the relocation centers where their confusion, frustration and idleness caused untold discouragement and suffering, may now be released individually under certain conditions.

"The W. R. A. has not only released thousands of them as temporary volunteers to harvest crops vital to food and material production of the nation", but it has also undertaken the *permanent* release of individual evacuees. They must first be "cleared by investigation and assured of employment outside of defense zones and in communities where they will be received without hostility."

Many students are waiting to be released. (Nearly 400 have already been placed in midwest universities.)

Federation Members! Can any of you take students into your homes while they complete their high school or college education? Or sponsor one or more of these Japanese-Americans, finding work opportunities, housing and financial aid for them?

Civil Liberties

Charles C. Webber, who is still in Virginia of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in order to help finance the U.S., has been threatened again — this time that the Ku Klux Klan is going to get after him.

To date he has not been able to secure an auditorium hall, a hotel room, or even a room in the City Hall, the County building, the public schools or in a church, so that the worker-citizen can publicly assemble and peacefully petition the Congress of the United States for a redress of grievances.

The City Council of the community where he is trying to organize the workers of a clothing factory into a trade union allowed the Boy Scouts to hold a meeting in the

Police Court Room but denied the use of the room to the members of his union on the grounds that the room "is not available for outside uses not in connection with City Government."

City church leaders have taken the position that if they brought up the issue before their governing boards it would precipitate a conflict within the church—a conflict that just *had to be avoided*.

M.F.S.S. members, do you agree with these church leaders? If not, are you willing to allow a law-abiding labor group to hold a meeting in your church building?

Now is the time for those of you who are members of Spring Conferences to prepare resolutions, memorials and reports dealing with the maintenance of civil liberties during wartime, and with other social, economic and political issues.

Write the national office *today* for helpful information!

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